

Threats, insults exception to rule for UNL ticket-takers

By Jeanne Mohatt

It takes a special kind of person to enjoy a job that includes fielding insults, threats, dirty names and milk cartons.

These people are the men and women in blue who patrol metered parking spaces near UNL, ticketing cars when time has run out. They must sometimes take abuse from university students, but they don't complain—much.

Kim Karas, 20, a public service officer for the Lincoln Police Department, checks the meters on 16th and R streets.

"I get insulted all the time," she said. "It gets old fast."

But, she said, she just smiles and waves with a grin-and-bear-it attitude.

BUT DON'T CALL THEM "meter maids." Some men are especially touchy about that.

The Lincoln Police Department calls them public service officers. Ten women work in the parking enforcement division. One PSO patrols 10th, 14th, 16th, R, S and U streets.

The UNL Police Department calls them cadets or security officers, depending on rank. One female and four male cadets check the meters in the parking lots on campus.

Donna Jones, a 32-year-old PSO, said she remembers a time when she was ticketing cars on 16th Street.

"I WAS JUST BEING NICE, giving out tickets," she said. Then someone in front of a fraternity house called her a derogatory name, she said. She backed up her police car and said, "One of you guys called me a ____." However, no one admitted it, she said.

"I don't care if you say anything," Donna said, "but say it to my face."

Some people at UNL, Donna said, take their cars out of their parking lots on football Saturdays and park them on the streets. They get a \$1 parking ticket, but they sell spaces in their parking lot to foot-

ball fans for \$3 to \$4 each.

Donna said sometimes people walk down the street putting pennies into expired meters in a latter-day Good Samaritan act. "That's illegal," she said.

ONCE, SHE SAID, SOMEONE picked up all the tickets on the cars along the street and pasted them to the windshield of a blue Ford.

People also try to put their ticket on another car, she said. Often this scheme is successful.

"The kids are usually pretty good," Donna said. Threats and insults are the exception, not the rule. But she does remember when someone whose car was being towed brandished a pop bottle. He didn't hit anything with it, though.

A UNL SECURITY OFFICER, who has worked for 18 years, said students have thrown apples, oranges and milk cartons at him while he patrolled the street in front of Selleck Quadrangle.

The officer, who refused to be identified, said he has been called "every name I can think of. I try to overlook most of it."

Does the "meter person" have a thankless job?

"No," the UNL officer said. "Most students are pretty good. Three or four times students have said, 'Thanks. I had it coming.'"

The officer said he writes 30 to 40 tickets a day in the summer and 70 to 80 tickets a day during the regular school year.

"I give out close to 200 tickets a day when school is in full swing," Karas said.

THEY ARE NOT REQUIRED to fill a quota, she said.

One PSO, who refused to be identified, said the practice of giving tickets on R streets is "not fair at all," when compared to 16th street.

Sixteenth Street has two-hour parking, so the PSO checks it only three times a day. Cars come and go so frequently that

she writes few tickets, she said.

But R Street has one-hour parking and the PSO said she must check it "every hour on the hour." She writes more tickets, she said, because students don't have time to run to their meters after a 50-minute class, especially if the instructor keeps them late.

Karas and Jones said they like their job, but they both have pet peeves.

Karas' is that she sees the same cars and the same people every day when she works

around the campus. However, Jones said she gets annoyed with people who do something wrong, know it's wrong, then become irritated when they get a ticket for it.

Perhaps there are psychological undertones involved in being a "meter person." For example, could it be a deep satisfaction in giving people tickets?

Jones sells tickets at the Cinema 1 and 2 Theaters in her spare time, she said.



Photo by M. Billingsley

No, it's not a love note, but a parking ticket from LPD's Kim Karas.

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